



SUPPLEMENTARY GUIDE

Volume I: Chapters One and Two

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PREFACE

First off, thank you for purchasing the PDF bundle of The Carpet Merchant! Every show of support is valuable to me, as this comic has carved itself a very special place in my heart, and it delights me whenever other folks enjoy the characters and story as much as I do. Also, if you're not already aware, **every purchase** of The Carpet Merchant on itch.io contributes to a monthly donation pool that is evenly split between three organisations - The Turkish Cultural Foundation, Project Amal ou Salaam for local level education of Syrian refugee children in Turkey, and a rotation of several interfaith and Muslim-positive centres (CAIR, The Interfaith Centre of New York, World Faith, and The Islamic Centre of New York). Comics and goodwill, huzzah!

The reason why I'm making this Supplementary Guide is because a lot of readers (and Twitter followers) have expressed interest in the historical and cultural research that went into this story. Even more so because it is about characters and places not common in any kind of mainstream (or even indie) media, which is a shame. The world is so full of interesting times and places, and everyone benefits from learning, reading, and creating more things outside the standard Western canon of history.

So this is what the guide is about - to show everyone a few things, talk about my literary and artistic influences, reveal authorial intent, and discuss comic layout/panelling. But let's be honest, I could talk about the comic all day.

Before we begin I'd like to be clear that, despite the amount of work I've done for this comic, I'm NOT an expert. I can't tell you with any ethical certainty or confidence what it is actually like to be the (real-life) identities of the characters here. That is the agency of my research sources (referenced throughout), or #ownvoices people. What I can only do here is share my resources, and wave my hands at the general direction of something true.



DICTIONARY

Alhamdulillah - expression of gratitude to God for good things, or plans that have manifested.

Anne - turkish word for mother.

Astaghfirullah - 'God forgive me', can be used formally or colloquially.

Baba - turkish word for father.

Bismillah ir-rahman ir-rahim - 'In the name of God, most gracious and compassionate.' Opening line of every prayer, and a phrase spoken before any important task, as a reminder of God's presence and goodness.

Djinni (plural: djinn) - The third kind of being God created, alongside angels and humanity. Similar to the fae.

Fi amanillah - 'May God protect you', fare thee well.

Ghul - a type of djinn, a carnivorous desert-dweller that preys on travellers.

Inshallah - 'God willing', expression of hope for future plans and behaviours.

Mashallah - 'God has willed it', expression of appreciation, joy, happiness, praise.

Salaam - Greetings, hello.

Subhanallah - 'God is perfect', 'Praise God'.

Ya Allah or ***Yallah***, or ***Ya Rab*** - Oh my God, or Oh God, depending on the tone.

If you want to learn more about some of these expressions (which are incredibly nuanced in meaning, as Arabic is a very complex and multi-layered language), there are plenty of resources online from scholars who deconstruct the linguistics behind these words.



HISTORICAL SETTING

Volume I is set in 17th century Istanbul, in the middle age of the Ottoman Empire. The timeline of this comic is specifically 1655 - 1706 CE (with the majority of the story happening in 1680), which covers the reign of Mehmed IV (1648 - 1687), and the end of the Transformation Era of the Ottoman Empire.

The main reason why I set the story around here is because, simply, there was relatively nothing happening at the time. Mehmed IV was the longest-reigning Sultan of the Empire, and his rule signified a long period of stability. The other reason is that it is very close to the emergence of the West as a global power, which is a socio-cultural context vital for the next volume.

1636 - Ayse's birth

1638 - Zeynel's birth

1655 - Chapter One; Zeynel and Ayse's meeting

25 years of being together

1680 - main setting of the story; Chapter Two; Zeynel's death

Zeynel's pilgrimage to Mecca and across the Empire, Ayse's continued success of her business until her semi-retirement.

1696 - Zeynel's return to Ayse

1706 - The ending of their lives together, and Zeynel's chapter in Istanbul.

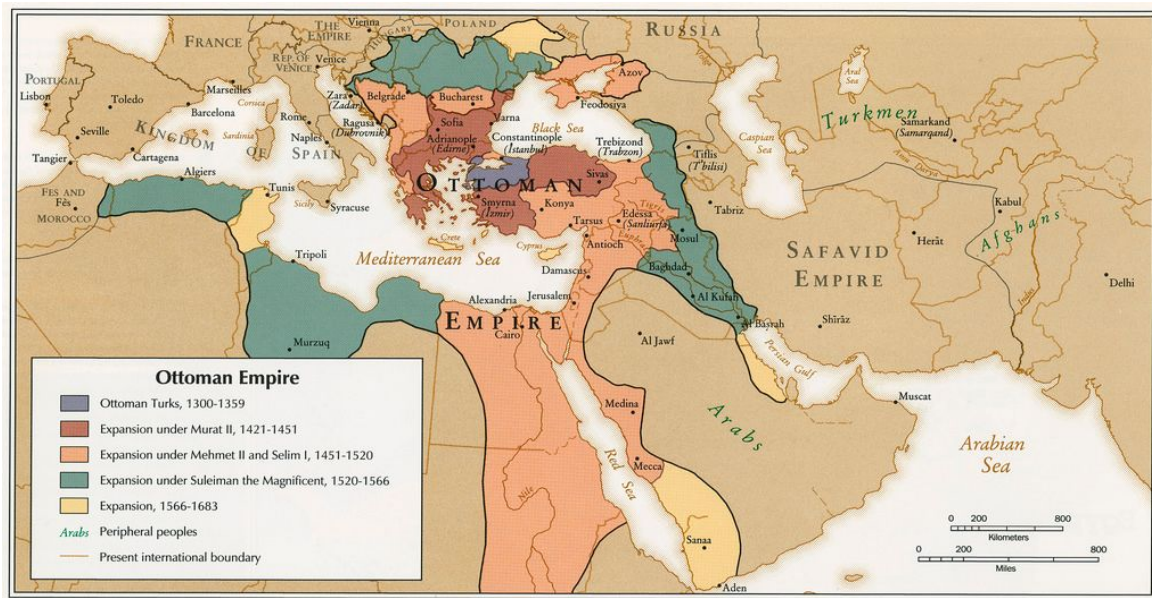
Zeynel travels west, to Cordoba in Andalusia (his ancestral home). He makes a name for himself as a carpet merchant in Spain.

1750 - Volume II; Zeynel moves to England



CULTURAL PRIMER

It's not necessary to have any knowledge about the background before reading the comic, but it adds to the world and some of the themes that are and will be explored.



[\(Source\)](#)

Istanbul is an ancient, cosmopolitan city, sitting between the East and the West. It was the capital city of many empires - Roman, Byzantine, Latin and Ottoman - before becoming the centre (it's not the capital anymore) of modern day Turkey. It was known by many names, but the most familiar name is Constantinople (which was what the Western world referred it as until the early 20th century). Within the Ottoman Empire, they called it Istanbul, or Kostantiniyya (and its variations). This is why the comic's called *The Carpet Merchant of Konstantiniyya*. It situates it in the Ottoman context proper (to use Constantinople would shift the attention to the West), but also, it sounds more harmonious than Constantinople or Istanbul (sorry).

Being in the middle of the East and West means that Istanbul was, and still is, an international trade port. It once was part of the Silk Road, and it linked the Roman/Byzantine/Ottoman seat with its territories (which spanned Europe, the Middle East, and Central Asia), and its colleagues (China and India, and later, Italy, England, France, Spain and Portugal). Because of all this activity, the city was historically diverse, even in the Ottoman Empire. That's why it's important to understand that the world has always been connected for a long

time, contradicting the assumption that old timey people weren't aware of each other.

(The cultural history of Turkey)

The main religion in the Ottoman Empire was Islam, although it also had a sizeable population of Christians and Jews. The Empire operated under the millet, which means that it had three court systems: one for Muslims, one for non-Muslims, and for trade (general use).

The Empire also had clothing laws (1) (2) (3) (4) - a set of rules of what each group can or cannot wear. Some colours were exclusive to Muslims; green and white, for example. Headwear was to be worn in public at all times for everyone. Obviously not everyone followed these rules 24/7, and it changed constantly, so there is some creative leniency in fiction. The rules also were be more enforced in the capital as a form of social and royal power, losing its influence the further away you go.

The outfits that were drawn and photographed by Europeans were not always the truth, especially for Muslim women (who weren't allowed to be seen in their informal wear around strangers). Even in Ottoman miniatures, most of the focus was on royal, harem and military wear. Fortunately, Ottoman clothes follow a template (headwear, inner wear, waistcoat, pants/salvar, belt, kaftan, socks, and shoes), and women/men's clothing styles were almost the same (barring the formal wear for women). So less headache for an artist to draw.



The comic is done in homage to the Ottoman book arts. Primarily, it's stylistically influenced by Ottoman miniatures (minyatür): illustrations that accompany works of poetry, or scrapbooked together into a folio. The people and objects in miniatures are stylised flat, with perspective organised in a 1-dimensional hierarchical manner, contained within a border and laid above a patterned/plain background. Other miniature styles referenced in the comic are Byzantine and Persian.



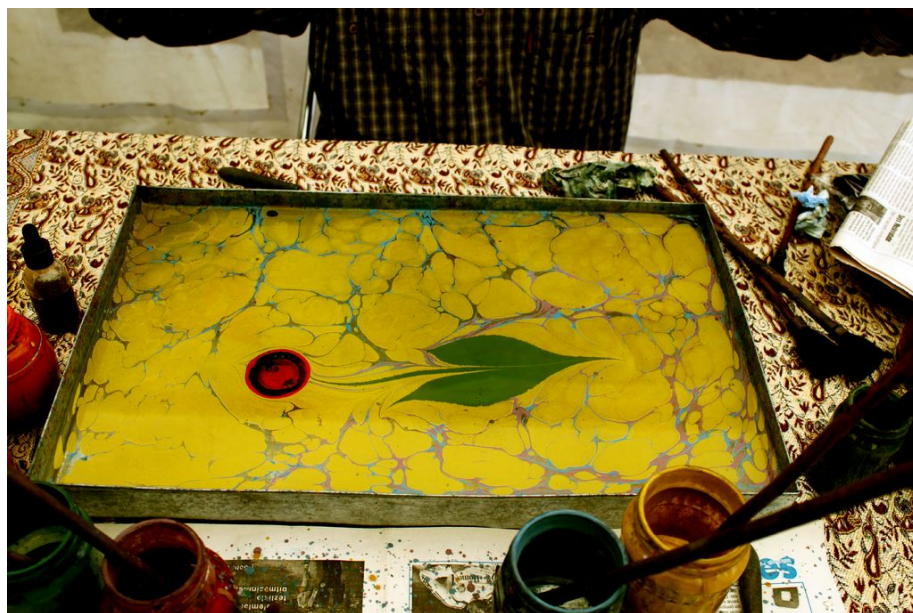
Samples of Ottoman miniature. Sources: Various. More info: [\(1\)](#) [\(2\)](#) [\(3\)](#)

The other influence is illumination. Calligraphy and decoration are especially important, given the general rule against figurative representation in Islamic art ([here's an interesting article that explains the complex and varying attitudes of figurative art in Islam and history](#)).



An Ottoman Quran. ([Source](#))

In a smaller measure is ebru, or marbled paper. ([a video to watch the process](#)) ([more info](#))



Beyond the art, books are a central feature in the story. They are everywhere, though they are more associated with Zeynel, who is a scholar and collector of stories. But books are not the only form of storytelling; there is the oral tradition, preserved in song and fable by a chain of grandmothers across time, and there is also the carpet tradition.

Carpets (rugs and smaller rugs, kilim) are an ubiquitous object in Ottoman life. It lined the floors of homes, mosques, and palaces. It had many uses - as bedding, table decoration, prayer mats - and given as a gift for all kinds of occasions - weddings, births, buying a new home, etc. It generally didn't have the luxury associated in the Western world (though the best carpets were luxurious), because it was an everyday object. But that everyday value is what makes it important, and why it's the focus of this story.

Every carpet is filled with meaning; it contains a diverse set of symbolism, and some of the designs reflect Islamic values (repeating patterns to represent eternity, the tree of life, the archways that point the praying person to Mecca). A carpet can express well-wishes for fertility and happiness, comfort and enlightenment, hope and protection, with its abstract characters - the scorpion, bird, dragon, etc - and its flower symbolism. This makes the carpet a form of storytelling, and the women weavers the storytellers.



The Carpet Merchant is written/drawn to be like a carpet; it has panels that parallel earlier ones, repeated phrases, and a set of symbolic imagery. All of them will be noted in the guide, which will be fun for you if you haven't noticed them yet. Some of them will break you even more.

VOL I: A FRAGMENT OF A TURKISH TALE

PROLOGUE (Pages 2 - 4)

- Zeynel on a ship bound for England isn't an intentional allusion to Dracula and Count Orlok's journey to foreign lands (I wrote and drew this scene before I read/watched them), but now that I know better, it is a cool coincidence. The only difference is that no crewmate dies, only the rats.
- 'A Fragment of a Turkish Tale' is in reference to the subtitle of Lord Byron's *The Giaour*. The *Giaour* is one of the earliest appearances of the vampire by name in literature. (see *The History of the Literary Vampire* at the end of this guide)
- The *Giaour* is a Romantic Orientalist poem about a love triangle - the infidel, the Muslim, and the beloved. The infidel obtains vengeance for the death of the beloved, and he is cursed to become a vampire (metaphorically). The poem itself is very checklist - it tried to squeeze in as many 'exotic' imageries as possible to evoke something that is not English.
- While this is not what Vol I is about (not even thematically or narratively), Vol II makes fun of the European obsession with Eastern culture. The subtitle was referenced because I liked the connection between what *The Giaour* did, and how *The Carpet Merchant* is responding to it.

CHAPTER ONE - THE CARPET MERCHANT

Page 5

- AH = meaning After Hijrah.
Muslims today, in addition to the Gregorian calendar, observe a different one - what is called the Islamic Calendar, or the Hijiri calendar. Their calendar begins during the year of the Prophet SAW's migration from Mecca to Medina (Hijrah = migration), which is around 622 CE. The story of the Hijrah is worth looking at, but beyond the scope of this guide. Anyway, 1091 AH is 1680 CE.

Pages 6 - 9

- The carpet merchant experience is fun, from what I've read. There's a whole customer-merchant theatrics at play, summarised as a battle of the wits, or plainly, haggling. The merchant tries to sell you his most expensive (and beautiful) carpets, and you the customer must possess enough willpower and awareness to stay within your budget. It helps if you know what you want.
- Someone from Turkey mentioned to me how rude it is to not finish your tea before offering your price.
- Zey's approach is less predatory, and more an exercise of poetry. He's a poetic person - he sees beauty and stories in everything -, which comes partly due to his upbringing as a scholar. He still needs to make that sale though.

Page 11

- "You're the one who can't live without me." If you've already read till the end, please cry with me. (this is the first of the repeated phrases)

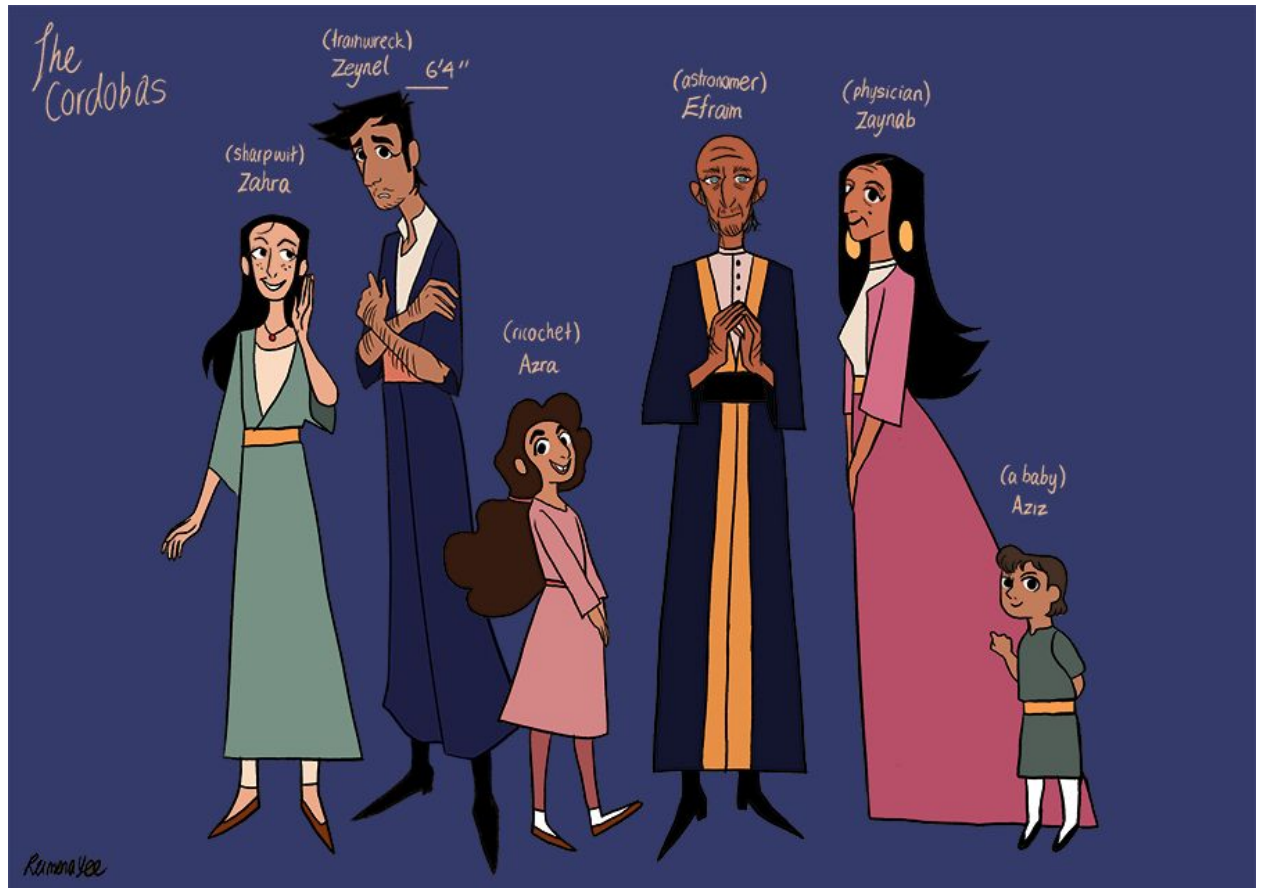
Pages 13 - 14

- Safiye's (pronounced like Sophia) relationship with Ayse and Zeynel is not fleshed out here, as her role in the story is to stand in as the storyteller (alongside Zeynel, the collector of stories, and his grandfather Yosef, both a collector and teller of stories).

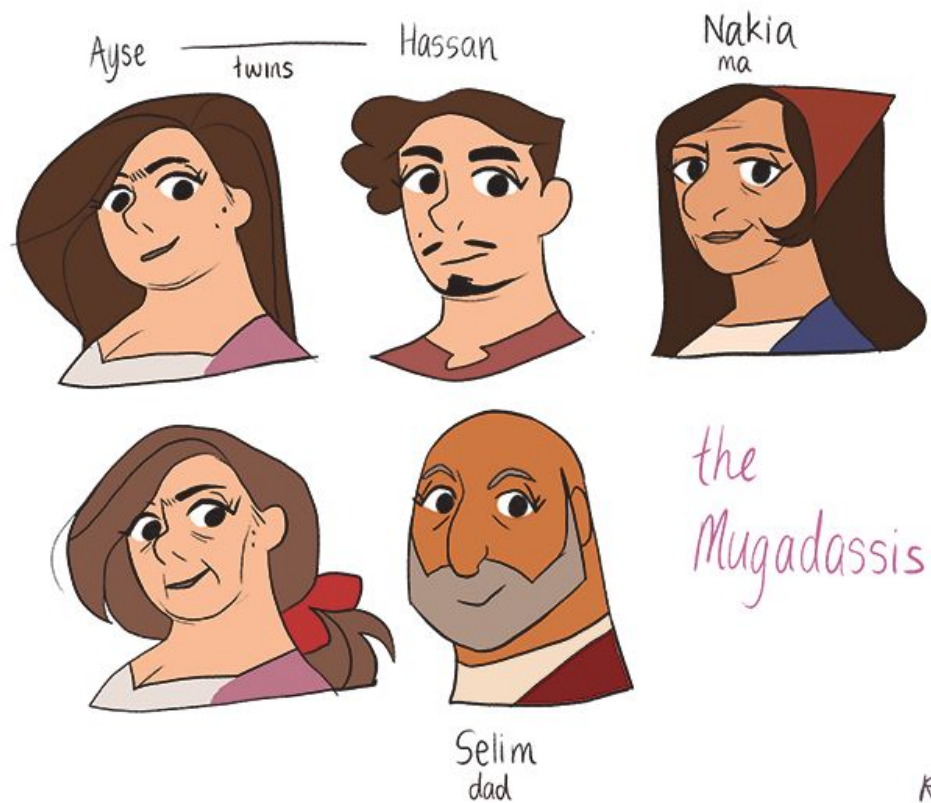
Additional lore: she's the protege of Ayse and Zeynel. Sort of like an adopted daughter, who they rescued from a terrible family by setting up a false marriage. She is a weaver with a talent beyond her age, and she aspires to make a palace carpet (the most beautiful type). But she suffers from imposter syndrome, fearing that she hasn't got what it takes, and what that means for her future.

25 years ago...

A flashback to when Zeynel and Ayse first met and got to know each other. This is the rest of Chapter 1. I originally wrote Vol I to be a straightforward 'This is Zeynel, and he's gonna become a vampire', but felt that that kind of storytelling didn't have enough emotional weight to warrant its later events. Hence, the inclusion of this flashback. It's a good thing too, because Ayse is the heroine, and she rightfully deserves to have her character fleshed out to the reader. The other thing the flashback did narratively is to emphasise the general storytelling theme.



The Cordobas (deCordobas). Character design.
A family of scholars, both current and upcoming.



The Mugadassis. Character design.

A family of the carpet tradition. (Hassan only appears once in the comic, poor dude)

At the time, I doubted if the inclusion of the flashback will hinder the pacing of the story. It definitely feels very slice-of-life, and I think if I was another kind of storyteller I would consider the chapter to be dwelling on 'unimportant' things (the emotionality of the characters, like Zeynel's embrace of his new life, and Ayse's complicated situation regarding her ambitions) that don't directly result in the events of the next chapter.

But the thing is, I'm a comics writer stitched by European and Asian cloth, which are both different than the American type which tends to emphasise individualistic plot action in expense of quiet, emotional exploration. Character-based moments are like bread-and-butter to me; to get to know characters and the community around them, and follow their lives with low-level personal stakes, that's the good stuff. And it's probably for the best that the flashback is like this, as the story got much bigger and more personal in regards to the stakes between Zeynel and Ayse.

Moral of the story: do what feels great and right for you.

Pages 15 - 16

- A Hafiz is someone who has mastered memorising the entire Quran. It's a serious and respected achievement, and anyone who has passed the test - which basically involves being able to recite an entire chapter or verse, based on a single line or topic picked anywhere from the Quran (no small feat; the Quran has 114 chapters) - is granted the right to use the honorific 'Hafizi'.
- The recitation of the Quran is an art. Because of the Quran's linguistically poetic quality, it is meant to be read and experienced out loud. There are rules regarding enunciation, melody, tone, and the like. Verses cannot be paused at the wrong place, or read incompletely. It is intense.
- Surah = chapter of the Quran. The Quran is divided into 114 surahs, from longest to shortest. It's not meant to be read chronologically. Surahs are categorised according to the two periods of the Prophet SAW's life, the Mecca era, and the Medina era. Historical and biographical context is therefore important to understand the chapters.
- Qibla = direction towards Mecca. All Muslims pray towards the same holy landmark (though in outer space, they pray towards the Earth, generally).

Page 17

- The hookah (nargile in Turkey) is smoking device that filters using water. Both men and women use it.

Page 18

- Zeynel spent his entire life in madrasah. Madrasahs are schools attached to mosques, and they teach things from theology and poetry, to logic and the sciences (maths, chemistry, medicine, astronomy). He's a nerd.
- At the time, Ayse is 18, Zeynel is 16. Hence his joking over her starting the marriage cycle so late. Generally though, it's not uncommon to marry at late teens/early adulthood, and there's a larger age range for marriage among the common people than in royalty. It depends on the socio-economic context.
- Usak is a region renowned historically for its carpets. Some famous ones have found themselves among European royalty and government (known as Holbein and Lotto carpets, after the painters). The proper name for these carpets though is Ushak.



Holbein carpet in *The Somerset House Conference (1608)*.

Page 19

- Ayse's family is large, and dedicated to the entire craft of carpet making (weaving, dyeing, tending to sheep) since their time as nomads across Central Asia. Her immediate family is focused on weaving. Her father, herself and some of her male cousins are carpet merchants.
- The layout is inspired by the Tree of Life motif.



- Oh Zey, you're so awkward.
-

Page 23

- Here are the two contexts for *Mashallah*.
 - when Zeynel uses it in reference to Ayse, he meant it in a polite, respectful way, acknowledging her personality and her family's affection for her.
 - when grandma uses it, it's to celebrate the birth of the neighbour's child.

Page 24

- It took me so long to find a proper source showing how to use the traditional Turkish drop spindle. It is built out of three sticks, which can be interlocked together and deconstructed just as easily - an important feature for carpet weaving nomads, who move around plenty.
([Here's a video showing how it's used.](#))



Page 25

- The imam is similar to the priest (BUT NOT), in that they lead people in prayer, read from the Quran, do sermons, and clarify any questions. As we shall see, this is what Zeynel was originally supposed to be.

Page 26

- Zeynel's 6' 4" so it's a delight to draw him interacting with doorways and people. (Ayse's 5' 6")
- Hanim = madam.

Page 27

- X per kerab in carpets is the equivalent to DPI in artwork/photography. It describes the resolution of the carpet - how much wool is packed into a single space, which translates to its durability, softness in texture and amount of detail woven.
- Learning how to come up with words on the fly when approaching a piece of art is a dang useful skill (Literature students solidarity).

Pages 31 - 32

- This is explained more in Vol II, but being a deCordoba (Zeynel's family name) is a heavy role to have in his mind. The deCordobas are an old Sephardic family of academics; his father Efraim is a theologian-astronomer, and his grandfather Yosef is a historian, cartographer and travel writer. On the maternal side (a different family) is his physician mother, Zaynab, and his aunt a lawyer. Everyone else is a mix bag of scholars and careers.
- Additional lore: Zeynel is a 5th generation (ethnic) Sephardim mixed with Persian and Turkic. The deCordobas trace themselves back to Cordoba, Andulusia (in southern Spain), hence the family name.

Pages 36 - 37

- Zeynel's memorising a text. He has a particular 'finger-counting' technique, which will appear again in subsequent chapters.

Page 38

- There's a melody to the 'Assalamulaikum-Waalaikumassalam' exchange in my head when writing this. I was brought up in a Muslim-majority country so the greeting is a familiar, everyday sound, and I love how beautiful it is.

Page 39

- (see next page) This is what Ayse's aunt was showing Zeynel: a set of traditional tools for carpet weaving, to cut, trim, disentangle and comb. ([more info](#))



Page 40

- What Zeynel is using as a bookmark is a sample fabric (or a sketch of the final carpet).

Page 46

- Take note of everything here: the **red thread**, the **colour/pattern** of their clothes, and the hand-kissing. They will come back again.
- The colour of their clothes in this conversation are an inverse of the ones in their first conversation in page 18. Like every cartoonist on the planet I associate characters with certain colours: Zeynel is blue and plain, Ayse is red/magenta and patterned. When he is given the purple, patterned jacket from Selim it visually indicates a personal shift that continues as he matures, moving away from the pressure of living up his family's legacy towards building Ayse's one. Ayse wearing blue is her acceptance of him into her world, but otherwise she keeps her person.

And that's it for Chapter 1!

CHAPTER TWO – THE VAMPIRE

Pages 1 - 2

- Zeynel is performing evening prayers (Salah Maghrib), one of the 5 prayers he must practice daily.
- The prayer rug is a practical item to maintain cleanliness during the act of praying. ([More info](#))

Page 3

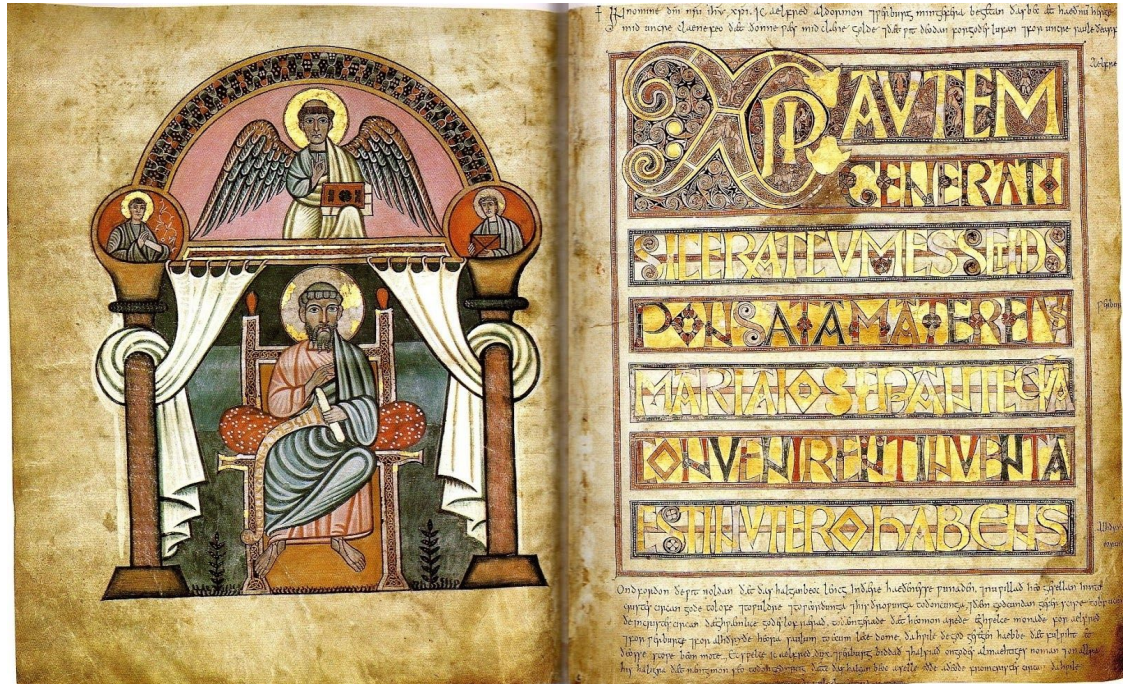
- Rumeli is the Ottoman name for the Balkans (Eastern Europe).

Page 5

- This is the most overtly Ottoman miniature spread I've done.
- Zeynel is hanging out in the city before he goes. He buys some food from the bakery, talks to some merchant acquaintances, and treats himself to dondurma.
- Dondurma is Turkish ice-cream. It's different than the usual kind of ice cream, in that its chewy texture and consistency (which is like cheese) allows it to not melt. Basically it's more solid. The traditional way to eat this is to slice it up like bread, then sprinkle it with pistachio and other little things.
- Dondurma ice cream uncles are the best.
- Fun fact: this is the only serious historical inconsistency I allowed (just imagine trying to transport ice cream from one side of the empire to another, without fridges). *crying emoji* I just wanted my boy to eat ice cream.

Page 6

- Istanbul is surrounded the Walls of Constantinople, with gates on each of its seven hills. This is the Edirne Gate, the same gate that the first Sultan went into to claim Constantinople after its fall to the Ottomans. The transition from Byzantine to Ottoman Empire which this gate signified is now ushering Zeynel's transition away from his Ottoman home to the ancient wilderness...



Byzantine manuscript illumination, that inspired the layout of the page. ([Source](#))

Page 7

- There's a whole ritual in their praying – there are about five to seven (depending on how you divide it) basic praying positions. This is the first one. A palm at each side of the head, beginning with the takbir and the Sura Fatihah (most importantly), before the second position.
- The stylisation of the flowers change as Zeynel crosses over from side of the page to the other, from Ottoman to European (millefleur). The increased crowding is meant to reflect confusion, chaos, and the approach of something foreign (and dangerous).



Rumi dancing with his disciples. To show you how the flowers are drawn. ([Source](#))

- The millefleur is what you'd see in European medieval tapestry. A famous example is *The Lady and The Unicorn*, accompanied by another example.



Pages 5 - 7

- These three spreads are meant to be a triptych. The first is the usual Ottoman miniature, the second is a Byzantine homage, and the third is European tapestry. Zeynel is passing from home to danger, familiar to foreign, city to nature, contemporary to past, Istanbul to Eastern Europe, Ottoman to Roman ... life to death.

Page 9

- وَأَنْفَقُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَلَا تُلْقُوا بِأَيْدِيكُمْ إِلَى التَّهْلُكَةِ وَأَحْسِنُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ
And spend in the way of Allah and do not throw [yourselves] with your [own] hands into destruction [by refraining]. And do good; indeed, Allah loves the doers of good. – <http://quran.com/2:195>
- يَسْأَلُونَكَ مَاذَا يُنْفِقُونَ قُلْ مَا أَنْفَقْتُ مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَلِلَّهِ الدِّينُ وَالْأَقْرَبِينَ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسَاكِينِ وَابْنِ السَّبِيلِ وَمَا تَفْعَلُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ بِهِ عَلِيمٌ
They ask you, [O Muhammad], what they should spend. Say, “Whatever you spend of good is [to be] for parents and relatives and orphans and the needy and the traveler. And whatever you do of good – indeed, Allah is Knowing of it.” – <http://quran.com/2:215>
- إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ غَيْبَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاللَّهُ بَصِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ
Indeed, Allah knows the unseen [aspects] of the heavens and the earth. And Allah is Seeing of what you do. – <http://quran.com/49:18>

Page 11

- Zeynel is a polyglot, due to his upbringing. Arabic to learn the Quran, Persian for poetry and other texts, and Turkish and Ladino are his mother tongues. He'd also know a smattering of French, due to his career as a merchant.
- Mora Strigoi is a terrible name (I originally made it as a placeholder), but I've come to love it so. Translated from Slavic, it generally means “Nightmare Vampire”.
- Khans (or cavaranserais) are rest stops built for travellers and merchants. They contain the usual amenities - water, an inn, a stable, some place to sleep.

Page 12

- This is another Tree of Life motif.
- **Şehirköy** is the old Turkish name for Pirot, a city in today's Serbia.
- Balkan rugs are very dark and rich. When I wrote Mora's little speech I wanted to evoke the Balkan mountains, and some element of revolution and national pride. But it also sounds very superficial, and as we shall get to know Mora more, that is who he is.

Page 13

- Elixir of Life. Technically, Mora isn't wrong... but he's not gonna sell it, he's gonna steal it.
- If you pay attention to the smoke from the fire, you can see Zeynel through it, but not Mora in the following panel.

Page 16

- Ghuls are a type of djinn, an extra-dimensional being that preys on lost travellers and eats them. This is different than the popular modern conception of the ghoul.

Page 17

- AAAAAAAAAA NOTHING'S GONNA BE THE SAME ANYMORE.
- His mother (reminder, she's a physician) taught him very well.

Page 20

- Borek is a type of baked pastry.
- Turkish coffee comes in several degrees of sweetness. What Zeynel is ordering is super sweet. Sugar (or the lack of) is an integral part of the coffee-making process (you don't put the sugar AFTER it's in the cup), so it's important to indicate how sweet you'd like your coffee to be so the formula can be adjusted.

Page 27

- Surah al-Fatihah: <https://quran.com/1>

Page 28

- Zeynel's rushing to perform ablution - a ritual cleansing with water (or sand, if presented with none). Islam prioritises ritual purity (i.e hygiene and cleanliness), especially before prayer (reminder: five times a day), and approaching sacred places/objects.

Page 35

- I really liked drawing this spread. It shows the sweetness and sense of humour central to their relationship, and how it has matured since the conversation in the verandah in Chapter 1.

Page 38

- The art style I've used to depict the djinn is in homage to ***Siyah Qalam*** - black ink drawings, which is part of the historical heritage of the nomadic people who will one day form the Ottoman Empire. These drawings are a synthesis of Chinese, Persian, Indian, Turkish and various other cultures in the region, and contain lurid depictions of (perhaps pre-Islamic) demons and mundane nomadic life. ([more info](#))

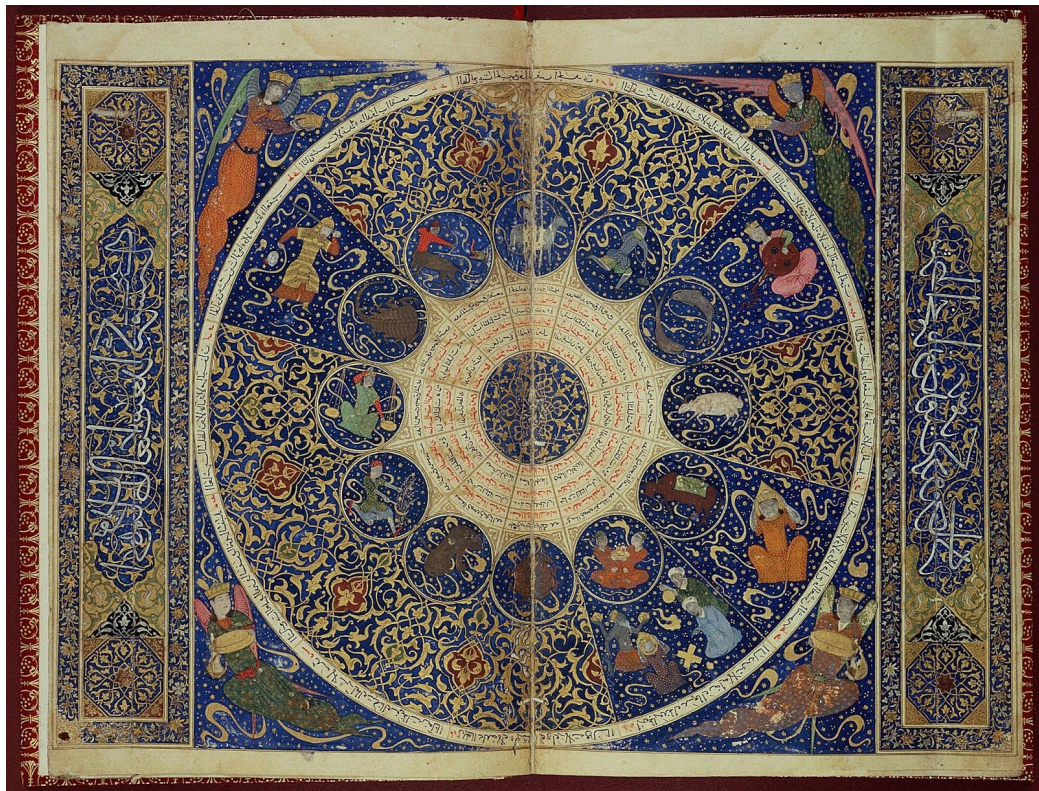


Page 39

- He's heading to the Sultanahmet Mosque, also known as the Blue Mosque.

Page 42

- This layout is in homage to the 'Horoscope' from the Book of the Birth of Iskandar, and the central ceiling decoration in the Blue Mosque.





Page 43

- لا حول ولا قوة إلا بالله

There is no change of state, no strength that one inherently possesses, except through the guidance, might and power of God. (Hawqala)

- لَا يَكْلِفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتْ وَعَلَيْهَا مَا اكْتَسَبَتْ رَبَّنَا لَا تُؤَاخِذْنَا إِنْ نَسِينَا أَوْ أَخْطَأْنَا رَبَّنَا وَلَا تَحْمِلْ عَلَيْنَا إَصْرًا كَمَا حَمَلْتَهُ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِنَا رَبَّنَا وَلَا تُحَمِّلْنَا مَا لَا طَاقَةَ لَنَا بِهِ وَاعْفُ عَنَّا وَارْحَمْنَا أَنْتَ مَوْلَانَا فَانصُرْنَا عَلَى الْقَوْمِ الْكَافِرِينَ [Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:286](#)

Allah does not charge a soul except [with that within] its capacity. It will have [the consequence of] what [good] it has gained, and it will bear [the consequence of] what [evil] it has earned. “Our Lord, do not impose blame upon us if we have forgotten or erred. Our Lord, and lay not upon us a burden like that which You laid upon those before us. Our Lord, and burden us not with that which we have no ability to bear. And pardon us; and forgive us; and have mercy upon us. You are our protector, so give us victory over the disbelieving people.”

- Before anyone gets funny ideas; the term ‘disbeliever’ as translated into English here is ambiguous and doesn’t necessarily imply those who are not Muslim in the prototypical sense, though that can be the case depending on the context (the where, when and why) of a selected passage. The section of which this verse comes from, starting from 2:284 – 2: 286 is from the Meccan period, right at the peak of oppression and persecution of Islam (which at that time was a minority

religion challenging the status quo of the majority polytheistic religion) and just before the Prophet's flight to Medina. So in this verse, in this case, in this context, the 'disbelievers' refer to the tribe of the Quraish – who didn't believe in the One God and who many times before have attempted to kill the Prophet and intimidate his followers. There's a lot of linguistic and historical nuance that comes with this verse, the word 'mushrik' and also the structure of the Quran as a whole (don't read it like the Bible, for one), and I highly recommend going into quran.com, islamicstudies.info or John Kaltner's *Introducing the Quran* for a primer on how to approach the scripture beyond superficial or misunderstood preconceptions.

Page 44

- **Red thread**

Page 55

- Title drop! Formally she and Zeynel share the title, each for their own reasons: Zeynel because he is the protagonist and that is how the characters see him in Vol II, and Ayse because this entire comic is about her and her legacy. Which makes her THE Carpet Merchant of Konstantiniyya.

Pages 61 - 66

- The nightingale (bolbol) and the rose (gol) are stock motifs in the tradition of the diwan, originating from Sufi poetry in Persia ([more info](#)). This is an original story inspired by common diwan themes as well as themes in this comic.

The basic idea is that the nightingale represents the poet – the artist voice – who longs for the rose, which represents the beloved. The most interesting thing about this is that in Sufi poetry (or much of medieval Middle/Near Eastern poetry), the rose represents two kinds of the beloved – Earthly Love (as in, your romantic partner), and Divine Love (as in, God). They are not separate, but two sides of the same coin. The love that that artist devotes to the romantic or platonic beloved is the same, or from the same source, as his love for the divine. To further emphasise this sameness of love this kind of poetry is set in a Garden of Paradise, which could be a literal garden on earth, or heaven. In Islamic conceptions of heaven, not only is Paradise/Jannah where you meet God, but where you reunite with the people you love i.e your family, which includes your spouse.

The message is this: to love someone is to love God. Or even more profoundly, to love God is to love someone.

- My version of the Nightingale and Rose, I hope, conveys this theme. I only refrained from using Petrarchan language ('Oh woe is me the friendzoned lover') as is popular in love poetry of the time, because 1) I'm annoyed at it 2) I wanted

this story to express the mutual respect and equality of Zeynel and Ayse's relationship.

- The nightingale who is voiceless learns to sing. His love for the rose gives him the voice to finally express that love, and in turn he uses it to express his gratitude towards God. Meanwhile the rose, who starts out as an ordinary Tulip (petals closed up), blooms in response to this nightingale's devotion, understanding now that she is a being worth loving. This gives her the confidence to reach out to the world (and to God), and reveal her true power and beauty.

Both the Nightingale and Rose benefit from each other's presence. Their destiny is bound together.

Page 74



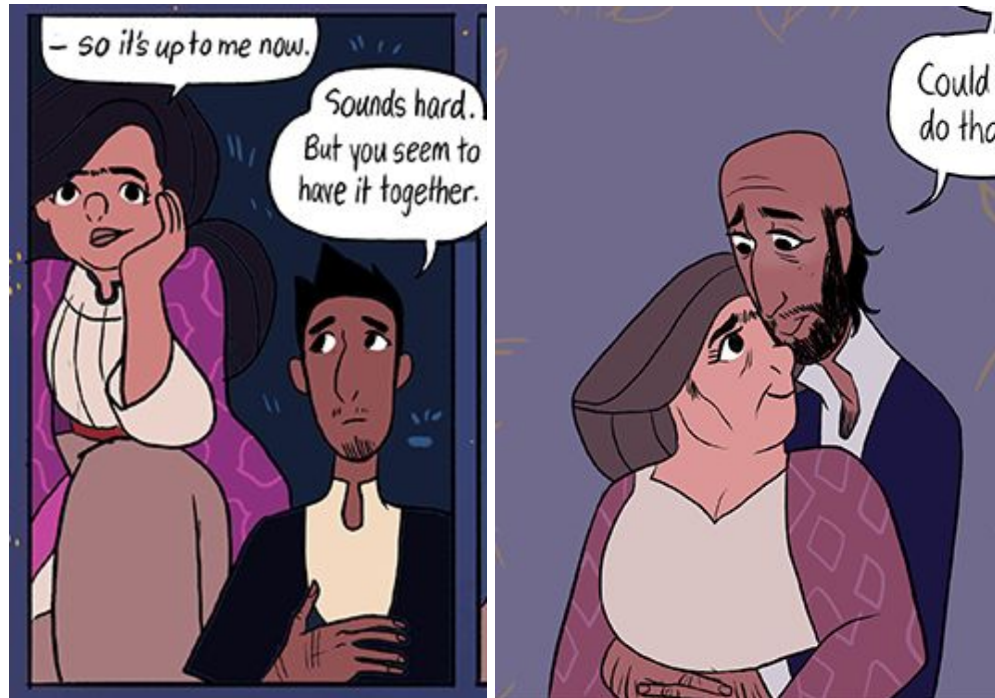
- Remember this spread? It's back.

Pages 75 - 76

- To understand Zeynel's reasoning for why he refuses to turn Ayse, we need to understand the concept of predestination in Islam (Qadar). It is a complicated philosophical issue/concept (1) (2), but basically it just means that God only has the power and knowledge over the fate of His people. In this tense situation, Zeynel refuses because to choose to cut Ayse's life short is to dictate her death with his own hands, rather than with God's, which goes counter against their beliefs.

- Though the strongest reasoning is that he loves her and knows she doesn't deserve to be held down by him, whether by her insistence for him to stay, or, to become djinni like he is. This is a characteristic of him that's more easily seen in the additional lore material in my *mind*, but his entire relationship with her has always been him choosing selfless sacrifice, by putting her first and valuing her happiness. The only solution then is for them to let go.

Additional notes:



- The clothes in the first conversation vs the last (almost?) conversation.

AND THAT'S IT!! Thanks so much for reading Vol II! And going through this supplementary guide. Hope you learnt some new things. If you're interested in reading up more, use the stuff in here as a primer (keywords, topics, etc) for further research into Ottoman and Islamic theology, practice, art, culture and history. There's such a broad world out there that The Carpet Merchant couldn't cover (not like it can, anyway).



HISTORY OF THE LITERARY VAMPIRE

Every culture has their own version of a blood-sucking spirit, from the Jiang-shi in China, Pontianak and Menanggal in South East Asia, Lilithu in Mesopotamia, and the Strigoi in Romania. The vampire-like myth is one of the oldest and most obscure in folklore.

But vampires (as we know them today, as humans cursed) didn't appear in literature until the mid-18th century in England. The earliest mention of the vampire is in Robert Southey's epic, *Thalaba the Destroyer*, followed by Lord Byron's *The Giaour*. But those two aren't vampire fiction, per se. They are predominantly Romantic Orientalist fiction.



Romantic Orientalism is a genre of fiction which appropriates Eastern imagery, themes and morals, to evoke an 'exotic' atmosphere (i.e not English). This genre is both contextualised - it is very English, given the nationality of the writers - and decontextualised - it is an extremely inaccurate (and microaggressive) interpretation of what an Eastern/Muslim world is like.

But how does Orientalism relate to the birth of the literary vampire? Besides the vampire being first mentioned in Romantic Orientalist poems, the poets derived their inspiration and resources from books and cultural studies that dealt with the Orient. The seminal book, the one that started this whole fad, is the French and English translations of *The Arabian Nights*. *The Arabian Nights* was many an European's introduction to (the concept of) the Eastern world, with all its sultans and myths. One of those things they got to know is the ghul.

The ghul is a kind of djinni (genie), an extradimensional entity that preys on travellers in the desert (or in The Carpet Merchant's case, the plains), and eats their bones, flesh and blood. With the West looking East, they also discovered Eastern Europe's nosferatus, vampyrs, and strigois, and those vampires' relationship to their home, families and loved ones. Merging these two together, you get Southey's Oneira (the hero's beloved, who becomes a vampire which he must kill to move on), and Byron's The Giaour (who is cursed to rise from the dead and suck the blood of his family, in particular his daughter).

Following that is John Polidori's The Vampire, which transforms the vampire from a mythical, vague being into a kind-of-human with a place and status. This is the birth of the aristocratic vampire (Byron, begrudgingly, was associated with vampires for the rest of his life), and as we all know, culminates to that King of all Vampires, Bram Stoker's Dracula, and all the familiar tropes of vampires we have today.

The literary vampire has always been associated with the other. Not the Other always, but as representative of values that was in contrast to European attitudes of the time (regarding identity, sexuality, government, progress, history). The origins of the vampire in 'not-Western' folklore enforced this notion, which allowed them to explore their own values. In fiction, vampires have no reflection of their own when looking in the mirror, but why should they? Mirrors don't reflect their own self, but the people who look into them. And that is what the vampire does to the Western world.



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And you! For reading The Carpet Merchant. < 3



RECOMMENDATIONS

Research Bibliography (the accessible ones):

1. The Quran, quran.com
2. A Tale of Three Cities: Istanbul, Bettany Hughes
3. Introducing the Qur'an: For Today's Reader, John Kaltner
4. The Qur'an: The User's Guide, Farid Esack
5. A History of God, Karen Armstrong
6. Subjects of the Sultan: Culture and Daily Life in the Ottoman Empire, Suraiya Faruqi
7. Orientalism, Edward Said
8. Turquerie: an 18th century European fantasy, Haydn Williams
9. Turquerie and the Politics of Representation, Nebahat Avcioglu
10. [Art Treasures of Turkey, MET Museum](http://www.metmuseum.org)
11. The Turkish Cultural Foundation, <http://www.turkishculturalfoundation.org/>

Other media like The Carpet Merchant:

1. Patrik the Vampire, by Bree Paulsen
2. Kids These Days, and Letters for Lucardo, by Noora Heikela
3. Puu, by Akshay B. Varaham
4. A Bride's Story, by Kaoru Mori
5. Persepolis, by Marjane Satrapi
6. Zahra's Paradise
7. The Breadwinner, by Deborah Ellis and Cartoon Saloon
8. The Prophet, by Khalil Gihbran
9. Swimmer Among the Stars, by Kanishk Tharoor
10. The House at the Edge of Night, by Catherine Banner
11. Frankenstein, by Mary Shelley
12. Dracula, by Bram Stoker
13. The Magnificent Century (Muhteşem Yüzyıl)
14. [Masterlist of Literature Written By and Including Queer Muslims](http://www.masterlist.org)

[Support #ownvoices](#)

[The Muslim Squad](#)

Remember to donate to The Turkish Cultural Foundation, Project Amal ou Salaam and/or the interfaith/Muslim-centered organisation of your choice!



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This supplementary guide is purchased from

<https://reimenayee.itch.io/>

Learn more about The Carpet Merchant, and read Vol II:

<http://reimenayee.com/the-carpet-merchant-of-konstantiniyya/>